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ABSTRACT

The notion that women internalize personality characteristics that render them psychologically, socially and intellectually crippled is a denial of experience. The study of sex roles cuts across several disciplines, as well as being the major focus of women's liberation, thus creating the possibility for reappraisal of the field and its assumptions. Two positions have been taken about the bases of sex roles. One view, taken by the school of sociobiology, asserts that males are superior as social animals. The second, taken by environmentalists, states that sex differences are the result of societal intervention. Further studies implicitly accept the polarized model of male/female development. Analysis of the research shows that the basic assumptions of the field actually create rather than explain reality. The literature on sex roles assumes that women really do have stereotypical personality traits which result in inferiority. Acceptance of the assumptions constitutes a denial of the real and constant forces which make it difficult if not impossible for women and most men to achieve, to be independent, to be socially mobile, and to develop intellectually regardless of their psychological states. (BN)

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SEX ROLES AS AN ANDROCENTRIC VISION

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It's no longer common to hear discussions about the spiritual inferiority of women. Few would argue today that women are souless or ineducable (or conversely, that education causes uterine putrefaction in women). Yet the implication of much of the current research and theory in the field of gender roles (sometimes referred to as sex roles) is that women are indeed inferior because they develop (or possess) personality traits that may be important in the family, but are not functional in the public realm.

The study of gender roles cuts across several disciplines but also has become a major focus of the current Movement for Women's Liberation. This congruence has created the possibility for re-appraisal of the field and its assumptions. In this paper I want to begin with David Tresemer's article "Assumptions Made About Gender Roles" and spin out the implications of the current academic perspective on gender roles, both in terms of historic reality and social usefulness.

Tresemer argues that several misleading assumptions about gender roles appear in almost all research: (1) "that observed differences between the sexes are reflected in sex differences," (2) " that differences between the sexes are more important than similarities," (3) "that the trait of masculinity-femininity is a bi-polar, unidimensional, continuous, normally distributed variable that is highly important and consistently viewed," and (4) "that observed differentiation between the sexes at a societal level reflects deep personality differences in the expression of male and female principles." (Tresemer, p. 309)

Students of the field, whatever their political or intellectual biases, agree that "maleness' and "femaleness" are indeed different. The basis of this difference is variously attributed to biological (including genetic and hormonal) predispositions, cultural response (socialization or learning), or the particularity of the human condition. Similarly, these differences are alternately seen as societally (desirable) or as problematic.

Basically two positions have been taken about the bases of sex roles. One view, represented in its most recent incarnation by the school of socio-biology, asserts that males are superior as social animals, a result of hormonal or genetic factors which produce greater aggressiveness in males and that attempts to change these arrangements by social means may hurt the society. The second, argues that male/female differences are the result of societal intervention on basic differences and that gender role is learned. Therefore, the reformulation of socialization goals or change in socialization patterns within changing circumstances can eradicate differences and create conditions of new equality.

The two positions are opposed, of course, but there are basic agreements which have startling implications: (1) that there always have been specific clusters of masculine-feminine traits, and though these may vary from society to society, some are constant across time and culture, and (2) that the basic axes of polarization are aggressive (male) and passive (female). The major arguments center around the roots of gender differentiation, the degree to which differences are desirable as well as ubiquitous, whether they are inevitable as well as universal, and how much possibility for change exists in the modern world.

The cluster of traits that defines the stereotypical feminine personality in our culture is generally agreed upon by biological determinists and environmentalists alike, with a consequent agreement on the functional inferiority of women, because personality components are regarded as objectively placed. In contrast to these views, the feminist perspective is that women are and have been oppressed, not inferior, and that this oppression is circumstantial, material and changeable. Ironically, the gender role perspective has been more influential in informing the feminist perspective than the reverse. The following examples are cited as exemplary rather than as exhaustive.

Lionel Tiger, as the archetypical example of biological determinism, declares that bonding behavior, hostility, aggression and territoriality are characteristic of males in the mammalian order, and it is these behaviors in men that make human society possible. Tn this view, it is precisely the aggressive qualities of males that make cooperation and therefore mastery of the environment possible. For Tiger, the specific clusters of male and female characteristics and the differences between them are the basis of both male superiority and of society. Females are the inferior of the species because they lack characteristics that produce societal cohesion.

Ironically, deBeauvoir, an existential Marxist, substantiates this position. Searching for the origins of sexism in the human condition, she speaks of that which is specific to humanity as opposed to other animals. She finds that essential condition in the transcendental act which grows out of the struggle to stay alive. That act consists of the ever-increasing attempt at mastery of the environment through creative action. Transcendence is the existential act. Insofar as women are tied to their bodies by the

continual process of reproduction, they remain part of nature and are unable to transcend the environment. They are never fully human; they are immanent. The differences between masculinity and femininity are based on this fundamental difference between men and women which springs out of the polarity of function. As women are increasingly freed from the demands of parturition and nurturance they can move away from the feminine pole and towards the masculine. The extension of this reasoning is that the most degrading and immiserated form of male labor (productive of surplus value) is more human (creative) than the most exalted motherhood, and that the woman and inferiority have heretofore been synonymous.

Maccoby has devoted much of her career to sifting studies of sex role functioning and sex differences for evidence of what is socially induced behavior as opposed to biologically determined. Maccoby and Jacklin, in a mammoth investigation of the field, found that there is some evidence of basic sex differences particularly in the area of verbal ability, visual-spatial ability, mathematical ability and aggressiveness (pp. 351-2), and that these differences are consistent with an interactionist model of development (the joint impact of socialization and biology). (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1975) This finding is consistent with an earlier review of the field in which development of superior intellectual ability in girls was linked to an aggressive component. Tomboyishness in girls was associated with mathematical, logical and creative ability. Where women develop as superior intellectually and occupationally they are seen to do so on the basis of masculine personality components. (Maccoby, 1966)

The emphasis on appropriate role models for feminine achievement, on inculcating aggressive and assertive personality components in girls as a means to creative and ambitious occupation preference amongst women is a direct consequence of that view. Many of the new "non-sexist' childrens' books incorporate this perspective and concentrate on role reversal stories, in which girls act in typically masculine fashion. For example, in Firegirl, published by the Feminist Press, a young girl who wants to be a "fire person" when she grows up, endangers herself and others by attempting to rescue a cat from a burning house. Clearly, even those who reject biological explanations of sex differences implicitly accept the polarized model of masculine/feminine development. Maleness is defined in all cases in opposition to femaleness. That opposition is akin to an organizing myth which shapes and guides our perception of reality.

For example, Braverman, Braverman, Rosenkranz et. al. set out to determine the degree to which a stereotypical view of masculinity and femininity exists, and the consequence of such a view for the medical community's notion of the components of mental health. They developed a bi-polar model of personality by rejecting those traits which were not linked in a polar fashion to maleness/femaleness, and then asked mental health workers to characterize mental health for men and women (first separately and then together). Needless to say, the findings indicated a strong tendency to stereotype. But the stereotypes existed as much in the questionnaire as in the minds of the respondents. That is, in this section of the research, the mode of questioning created the findings. The fact that the authors take great pains to deplore such stereotypes does not vitiate the point that they have, themselves, accepted stereotypical modes of organization.

The main contention here is that the basic assumptions of the field actually create, rather than explain reality because of the way in which masculinity/femininity are defined in all discussions. The mode in which one frames questions influences the possibility of answers. Similarly, one's vision of the world is circumscribed by vocabulary and the logic of that vocabulary. Insofar as vocabulary is limited or implicit junctions or disjunctions are made between concepts through vocabulary, so understanding is limited. (Marcuse, p. 87)

The consequence of the structure of the language of the field is an inevitable assertion that women are inferior, even if that inferiority is not biologically determined but a result of socialization. The result is a denial of existential possibilities, historical change, and the degree to which situation is a significant factor in existential possibilities.

The belief system inherent in the language of the field leads to statements of the following form (all too common in the classroom and in the press): "They [unspecified forces] have brainwashed us [women]" and "We [feminists] must begin with the children because it is too late for us." This rationale is similar to other theories that ultimately blame the victim for his/her own victimization and deny situational forces (oppression, racism, discrimination, class) as immediate causal factors in explaining behavior. "Blaming the Victim," William Ryan argues,

> is, of course, quite different from old-fashioned conservative ideologies. The latter simply dismissed victims as inferior, genetically defective, or morally unfit; the emphasis is on the intrinsic, even hereditary defect. The former shifts its emphasis to the environmental causation. . . the stigma, the fatal difference--though derived in the past from environmental forces--is still located <u>within</u> the victim, inside his [sic] skin." (p. 7)

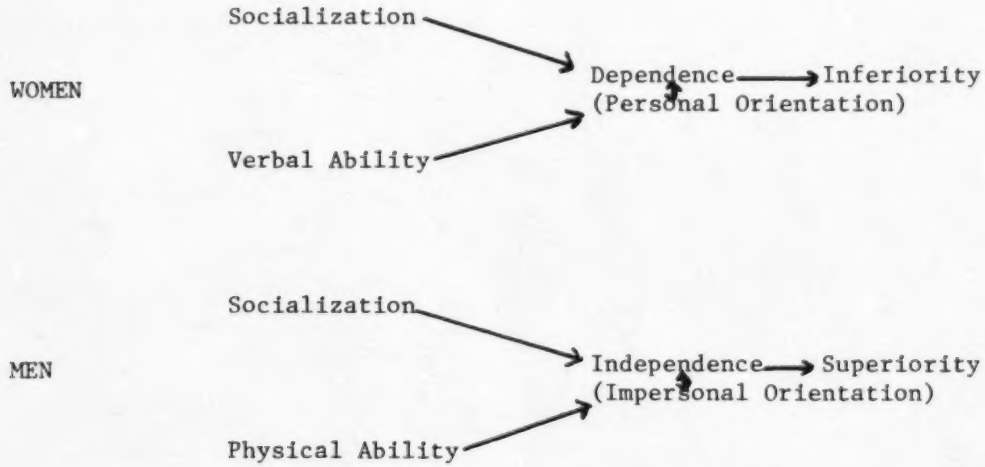
There are many good examples of feminist analysis which, despite a humanistic and sympathetic (even revolutionary) orientation to women, precisely follow Ryan's description. The contention here is that this is inevitable given the presuppositions of the field. A reasonably typical formulation follows:

> As women are taught to inhibit their anger, so are they trained to express their dependency. This process is also well documented in the literature on sex-role socialization. It will be remembered that Kagan and Moss demonstrated that whatever women's predispositions were as children, in our culture they tend to develop into dependent adults. Goldberg and Lewis have observed a significantly greater reliance on parents in girls as early as one year of age, while Bardwick and Douvan note a gradual loss after the age of two of dependency in boys, but not in girls. In school, teachers recognize, respond to, and hence reinforce dependent behavior in girls far more than in boys. Consistent with this, male dependency drops off sharply after school age, while that of girls does not.
>
> Among the many aspects of dependency that could be examined here, the one most pertinent to resocialization in psychotherapy concerns womens' reliance on others for approval, acceptance and guidance. Lacking faith in their own judgement and evaluative skills, women too often seek out and follow the opinions of others. This may take the form of basing their self-esteem on the reaction of others, acquiescing to authority and relying more on external controls being relatively unable to evaluate their intellectual abilities realistically, or tending to conformity and persuasibility. This exaggerated interpersonal orientation has been attributed in part to the young girl's greater facility with language and the increased opportunity for relating to others that this implies. (Kaplan, p. 359)

Yet the difference between a personality which is genetically determined and one which is culturally determined is inconsequential if change is precluded. For example, women may accept situational subordination because they accept the values which entail subordination, but such acceptance does not imply personality structure. When socialization theory argues that stereotypical behaviors are internalized through learning, change is not only problematic on the individual level, but on the social level as well. In fact under this model we cannot even account for changes in behavior within the last century. (Platt and Weinstein) Differences between women (or between men) are

explicable, in this model, only as individual symptomology.

The causal model implicit in the socialization model finds the bases of behavior in the introjection of stereotypes through imitation, expectation and restriction as follows:



The causal direction expressed here has its parallels in most progressive sex role theories that assume internalization as the process by which womens' inferiority is assured. Juliet Mitchell, in Psychoanalysis and Feminism, attempts a Freud-Marx synthesis within a feminist context. She contends that the Freudian description of female personality structure is correct under conditions of patriarchy (male dominance), and that as long as the family is the basic unit of society, patriarchy is inevitable. She argues that women are, indeed, inferior to men, that they lack strong super-egos and that they cannot be anything else so long as the family exists.

Although Mitchell is arguing for revolution in societal patterns, she does maintain that inferiority always has been the female lot. The tendency inherent in this approach has been described by Jesse Bernard as follows:

> Whatever the objectives of research on sex differences may have been its latent function has been, in effect, to rationalize and hence to legitimate the status quo, including of course, its role structure, especially the inferior position of women. The inferiority of women [is]. . . self evident from the research. . . [The research leads to the conclusion that] women. . . have been relatively unsuccessful within the present culture. (Bernard, p. 11)

Although most people are constantly and directly confronted with male-female couples in which superiority is by no means clear, it is difficult to translate perceptual understanding into general statements. When education, economic status and class is similar, the superiority of the male member of any given dyad is difficult to maintain. Despite the evidence of experience, however, inferiority on a macro scale (all women taken together as opposed to all men taken together) is projected onto the particular. The evidence consists in the fact that most human achievement can be traced directly to men, but of course structurally imposed inferiority does not necessarily imply personal inferiority, especially with regard to any particular task. Similarly, inferior position does not necessarily mean that an individual becomes psychologically inferior. The "blaming the victim" theory may be over simplistic, but it does highlight the intellectual commutation of societal pressure (eg. structural inferiority) into individual processes (eg. personal inferiority).

Insofar as the literature on gender roles assumes that women really do partake of stereotypical personality traits it concludes that this results in actual inferiority. The logical consequence of this reasoning is, that if women are to gain true equality they must become less feminine and more masculine, because success is a result of masculine personality traits. That is, girls must be brought up as boys (or not as girls). Role reversal, then, becomes the answer to discrimination. The problems inherent in this model are intensified by assumptions about causal order of trait formation.

The following listing organizes the characteristics generally associated with masculinity/femininity.

CHARACTERISTICS GENERALLY ASSOCIATED WITH:

MEN	WOMEN
Aggressivness	Passivity
Strength	Weakness
Activity	Inactivity
Physicality	non Physicality
Territoriality	non Territoriality
Competition, (Agency)	Affiliativeness (Integrative)
Combatitiveness (Conflict)	Yieldingness
Independence	Dependency
Achievement	non Achievement
Dominance	Obedience
Forcefulness	Docility
Competency	Incompetence
Objectivity (object orientation)	Subjectivity (peron orientation)
Creativity (Transforming)	non Creativity (Maintaining)
Visual/Spacial Ability	Verbal Ability
Ambition	un Ambition
Analytical Ability	Intuitive Ability
Adventurousness	non Adventurousness
Unemotionality	Emotionality
Assertiveness	un Assertiveness
non Nurturance	Nurturance
non Affectionateness	Affectionateness
non Compassion	Compassion
Unsympathy	Sympathetic

But the two lists are not all of a piece (equally valent). In fact, some of the characteristics are seen as causing the others. For example, M. Rosenberg says in "The Biological Basis for Sex Role Stereotypes":

> Current American child rearing values appear both to foster agency (Bakan) through emphasis on competition and aggression and to magnify the culturally given differences between the sexes. (p.376)

Moreover, the degree to which causality actually is inferred remains unrecognized in the literature but is implicit, if not explicit in the statements that follow:

> Increasingly we recognize how early and profoundly if unintentionally even unwittingly and unconsciously. . . we participate in producing passive, dependent, submissive, non creative females fit primarily for subservient and inferior roles in our society (Bardwick, p. 43)

or:

> The congenitally greater physical strength and energy drive of the male make him more assertive, adventurous and eager to manipulate the objects which he encounters. . . (Garai and Scheinfeld, p. 269)

If we separate inferred causes (those personality characteristics which lead to the desired behavioral patterns) from the results, the following table emerges:

STEREOTYPICAL PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

MALE		FEMALE	
CAUSE →	EFFECT	EFFECT ←	CAUSE
Agressive	Independent	Dependent	Passive
Active	Achieving	unAchieving	Inactive
Strong	Dominant	Obedient	Weak
Visual/Spatial	Forceful	Docile	Verbal
Territorial	Competent	inCompetent	nonTerritorial
Combatative	Creative	unCreative	Yielding
	Adventurous	unAdventurous	
	Assertive	unAssertive	
	Competitive	Integrative	
	Ambitious	unAmbitious	
	Objective	Subjective	
	Transforming	Maintaining	
	Analytical	Intuitive	
	unEmotional	Emotional	
	nonNurturant	Nurturant	
	unAffectionate	Affectionate	
	nonCompassionate	Compassionate	

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The table has been arranged so that the causing factors are on the outside of the figure. The startling aspect of this configuration is that the isolation of causal characteristics emphasizes how those traits which are seen as fundamental to maleness/femaleness are undesirable in terms of producing social coherence. There is a strong liklihood that anyone who is agressive, strong, territorial and combatitive, and active in all these attributes, is potentially or actually problematic as a member of society. Or taken in reverse, Hobbes argued that it was precisely to avoid the attack on social cohesion which was inevitable, given such personalities, that the State was instituted among men. Freud also contended in Civilization and Its Discontents, that civilization is not possible until such qualities are repressed. On the female side, any woman who is inactive, passive, weak and yielding is hardly a model of a social being (and, quite possibly, questionable as a potential mother). How bizare then, to believe that these characteristics not only go together with those supremely desirable personality traits (independence, creativity, nurturance, etc.) but actually constitute their base. Ironically, the causal configurations correspond quite amazingly to the description of the XYY and XXX chromosome type (Money, pp. 425-6): both types are described as non-functional or potentially dangerous.

What emerges from the field, then, is a vision of women as crippled beings: (1) crippled psychologically--impaired by their internalization of role prescriptions which render them mentally unstable at the least and sometimes dysfunctional for the family (Zelditch and Parsons, and Freud, p. 34), (2) crippled socially--inferior by virtue of those very characteristics which are the essence of femininity, yet render them incapable of creativity and transcendence (deBeauvoir), and finally (3) crippled intellectually--

incapable, since those qualities which lead to superior mental functioning are literally bred out of them (Maccoby and Jacklin, p. 367).

This notion, that women internalize personality characteristics that render them psychologically, socially and intellectually crippled is a denial of experience. Furthermore, it is a denial of the real and constant forces that make it difficult if not impossible for women (and most men for that matter) to achieve, to be independent, to be socially mobile, to develop intellectually, etc., irrespective of their psychological state. Furthermore, the model does not allow for the possibility that what is internalized may be a set of cultural patterns, rather than any explicit content. That is to say, women may accept the designation of passivity, docility, fragility, etc. as ideal, without being so. If this is the case, it means that a lot of energy is expended by women who attempt to fit the model, but who have a difficult time doing so.

On the other hand, an additional possibility is that conformance to societally valued patterns of behavior may be as much in the way we perceive behavior as in the behavior itself. If this were the case, it would never matter, for example, if men were nurturant (either by nature or by art) because no one would recognize their behavior as nurturant. If a boy (or a man) helped a friend, nurtured a baby, protected a sibling, exhibited caring and tender emotions over a long period of time; that behavior would either be called by a different name or would be seen as an anomaly or an accident, or might never be seen at all. That is to say, the same gesture (behavior) performed by different actors is susceptible to entirely different ascription of meaning depending on context and the rules of ascription. From this perspective, it doesn't really matter what a woman or a man does,

or is, what matters is how action or b ing is perceived. In a world that predicates only rabbits and elephants, giraffes and kangaroos can only be classified as pachyderms or coneys. But that classification is paradimatically limited. Perhaps the same is true for men and women.

* * *

The model which is the basis of the theory of gender socialization looks for the origins of sex roles in a functional division of labor between the sexes. Maternity carries with it certain functional responsibilities; pregnancy, parturition and nurturance, which have, for most of human history, meant that women were tied to the home and to tasks around the home (however the home is constituted). Men, free from such demands, have been much more concerned with outside, away from home tasks--hunting is the prime example (Washburn and Lancaster).

Socialization, according to the model, justifies and perpetuates this basic division of labor and prepares men and women for their different life orientations (Blaine, p. 12). Insofar as child-bearing is no longer the primary focus of female adulthood, exclusive socialization for maternity and motherhood is dysfunctional, firstly because it creates what it sets out to create and secondly because the world it works for no longer exists. Education is therefore the key to change in the model. If socialization patterns could be changed to conform to modern circumstances, women would be educated to better cope with the world, i.e., women would be men.

The ouble with the model is that socialization patterns cannot be sufficiently changed under conditions of inequality. Furthermore, over-reliance on a socialization model misses important other factors in the experience of individuals and implies that nothing can be done until a new generation of children have been brought up. But if the first is true, then the second is impossible. Thus, over-emphasis on socialization ignores the

structural conditions of the present that shape behavior. Women are capable of changing their behavior and their attitudes as well (not to speak of internalized expectations). A plea for androgeny does not avoid the difficulty, since it may well be the case that we are already androgynous, but are incapable of recognizing that fact. In reality, people may not behave accoding to the "ideal pattern" at all. But the behavioral pattern may be such that it minimizes the behavioral differences that are salient in the ideal.

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